



Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet

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Kentucky Artisan Featured in Early American Life Magazine

BEREA, Ky. – Christa Smith, of Elizabethtown, whose work is regularly featured at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea, has been featured with her “bride boxes” in an article in the June issue of Early American Life magazine. The magazine is a source for information on early American style, decorating, and traditions, and it covers both antiques and reproductions made by artisans working in period styles with traditional tools.

Elaborately painted wooden bridal boxes were part of the box-making craft tradition in Bavaria for more than a century. The tradition was at its height in German-speaking countries from 1750-1850, and these brightly painted wooden boxes were given to a bride to hold her wedding treasures and remembrances. In these special boxes, small items in the bride's trousseau, such as linens, lace and ribbons, or bridal accessories such as the bridal headpiece, handkerchief or bouquet, were stored and protected.

This old-world bridal box tradition has been re-created in America by a handful of folk artists, including Smith. A native of Germany, Smith builds upon her knowledge and heritage to create painted bridal boxes that are informed by tradition and her own original ideas.

Her designs are created to complement the shape of each box, and she often personalizes each with a certificate indicating the names and dates of each bride and groom. Smith uses acrylics to paint in hues and tones that are colorful yet subdued, and she finishes each box with multiple layers of satin varnish and a final buffing of the surface with beeswax polish.

Smith told Early American Life magazine editors, “It rewards the effort because you can tell the difference, like the icing on the cake!”

Smith creates numerous styles of traditional painted bridal boxes, which are regularly available at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea. She demonstrates once a year at the center during the summer, showing visitors how she creates her traditional painted bridal boxes. Smith will be demonstrating on Saturday, May 26, from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea.

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea is located at 200 Artisan Way, just off Interstate 75 at Berea exit 77. The center is open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and features annual special exhibitions, a sales gallery and gift shop with fine art and crafts, Saturday demonstrations by Kentucky artisans, and a cafe open from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., which specializes in Kentucky cuisine. For information about the center's programming, call 859-985-5448 or visit the center's website at www.kentuckyartisancenter.ky.gov

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea is an agency of the Kentucky Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.



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